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ABSTRACT

This is a digest of a monograph that explores recent theory and research on the importance of college students' effort and involvement in promoting positive college outcomes. An opening section introduces the issue noting that institutions must work to create a climate in which all students feel welcome and able to fully participate. At the same time institutions must nurture an ethic that demands student commitment and promotes student responsibility. A section on student responsibility summarizes Robert Pace's standards embedded in the College Student Experience Questionnaire. Student responsibility is important as the key to all development and learning, because irresponsible students diminish the collective academic life, and because responsible habits pay lifetime benefits to the individual and society. A following section notes the work of Vincent Tinto, Alexander Astin, and Ernest Pascarella on student responsibility. A final section looks at how institutions can encourage responsible student behavior by stressing the importance of student achievement, by conveying the institution's purpose in an unambiguous manner, and by creating an ethos where students believe they are members of a larger community. In addition, small-scale, human environments for student faculty interaction, and other efforts to enhance student faculty relations are important. (JB)

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Turning Teaching into Learning
The Role of Student Responsibility in the Collegiate Experience

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Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of student effort and involvement in their academic and co-curricular activities as the decisive elements in promoting positive college outcomes. As colleges have struggled to extend opportunities, an accompanying expectation for students to assume responsibility for their own education often has been lacking. Institutions must work to create a climate in which all students feel welcome and able to fully participate. It is equally important to nurture an ethic that demands student commitment and promotes student responsibility. Students can contribute to their own learning and to the development of a campus climate in which all can grow and learn.

What Is Student Responsibility?

Colleges are learning communities, and individuals accepted into these communities have the privileges and responsibilities of membership. If we are to communicate our expectations, we must offer a set of standards and examples that moves our discussion from generality to practice. Robert Pace has offered such a set of standards and has embedded them in the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ).

The CSEQ is based on the proposition that all learning and development requires an investment of time and effort by the student. At the heart of the CSEQ is a set of scales which defines the dimensions of student responsibility. These scales are called "Quality of Effort" scales in that they assess the degree to which students are extending themselves in their college activities. The domains include the use of classrooms, libraries, residence halls, student unions, athletic facilities, laboratories, and studios and galleries. The social dimension is reflected in scales that tap contacts with faculty, informal student friendships, clubs and organizations, and student conversations. Pace's work gives the academic community a map of the terrain of student responsibility and suggests concrete activities that contribute directly to student growth and learning.

Why Is Student Responsibility Important?

First, student responsibility is the key to all development and learning. Research has demonstrated that college outcomes are tied to the effort that students put into their work and the degree to which they are involved with their studies and campus life. Second, irresponsible students diminish our collective academic life. Within an individual classroom, the behavior of even a few highly irresponsible students or, worse, a large number of passive, disaffected students can drag a class down to its lowest common denominator. For an institution, the erosion of an academic ethos can lead to a culture that is stagnant, divisive, and anti-intellectual.

Third, the habits of responsible civic and personal life are sharpened and refined in college. Will employers, international economic competitors, or future history itself be tolerant of students who fail to develop sufficient self-control and initiative to study for tests or participate in academic life? Finally, if colleges are to reclaim the public trust, they must learn not to make promises that cannot be kept. Colleges have responsibilities to students and society. Yet, colleges are not *solely* responsible for the outcomes of their students. A clear acknowledgment of the mutual obligations of all members of the academic community is a prerequisite to restoring the academy's balance and clarity of purpose.

What Are the Foundations of Student Responsibility?

Professors Pace, Tinto, Pascarella, and Astin have offered explicit theories about how colleges can promote student learning and growth. Despite different uses of terms, these approaches have much in common. First, each theorist recognizes that the student's background plays a role in shaping college outcomes. This role is largely indirect and is moderated by the college environment and a student's interactions with faculty and peers. Second, each theorist sees the campus environment exerting an enabling effect on college outcomes. Last, all emphasize the importance of a partnership between the college and the student. Colleges alone cannot "produce" student learning. Colleges provide opportunities for interaction and involvement and establish a climate conducive to responsible participation. Each approach reflects the centrality of what we call student responsibility.

The body of research derived from the work of these theorists represents one of the strongest and most sustained accounts of what it takes to succeed in college. The review indicates that the effects of initial group differences on college outcomes are relatively slight and

largely mediated by the manner in which the student engages the college experience. Generally, college students appear more alike than different. The college context has two elements: 1) the structural features of the organization and 2) the climate or "ethos."

Structural features that tend to isolate students and promote an ethos of anonymity produce poor college outcomes. College climates characterized by a strong sense of direction and which build student involvement tend to promote favorable outcomes by promoting student-faculty and student-peer relations, as well as establishing an expectation that students will behave responsibly. Finally, the decisive single factor in affecting college outcomes is the degree to which students are integrated into the life of the campus, interact with faculty and peers, and are involved in their studies.

How Can We Encourage Responsible Student Behavior?

Institutional policies and practices must be oriented toward developing a climate in which students' responsibility and active participation in their own collegiate experience are promoted. Policies that stress the importance of student achievement and in-class and co-curricular challenge and support are essential for student growth. The institutional culture clearly must convey the institution's purpose in an unambiguous manner, and the ethos of the campus must be one in which students believe they are members of a larger community. As student culture serves as a filter for students entering college, care must be taken to ensure that students who are prepared inadequately understand the nature of college life and what is expected to attain satisfactory academic and developmental gains.

Small-scale, human environments must be built in which students and faculty collectively can engage in the process of teaching and learning. As learning is the process through which development occurs, it is crucial for students to be actively engaged in the classroom. Course activities are the vehicle through which students may become more fully engaged with academic material. The literature clearly indicates that the quality of effort that a student expends in interactions with peers and faculty is the single most important determinate in college outcomes.

This report concludes with a call for a new relationship between our institutions of higher learning and our students. A genuine shared purpose among all members of the higher education community can be created by recoupling individual rights with a sense of personal and social responsibility around issues of teaching and learning. The work of Pace is a good place at which to begin thinking about the renewal of our intellectual community. As Pace reminds us, all learning is the mutual responsibility of students, faculty, and administrators. Student responsibility doesn't just happen. We must expect it, foster it, and nurture it. Pace is a good place at which to begin thinking about the renewal of our intellectual community. As Pace reminds us, all learning is the mutual responsibility of students, faculty, and administrators. Student responsibility doesn't just happen. We must expect it, foster it, and nurture it.

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